

Figure 1 (Left)

# IS FANFICTION LEGITIMATE LITERATURE?

## What is Fanfiction?

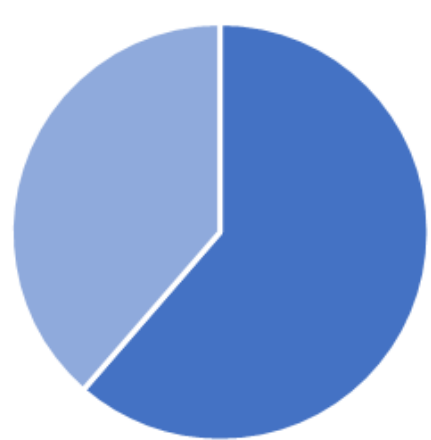
A piece of fanfiction is a story based on a pre-existing work, written by fans of that work. Today, fanfiction is most popularly published online and with no charge.

## What is Legitimate Literature?

In this research, legitimacy in literature is defined by three criteria; the lawfulness of a work, the recognisability of the work as a proper form or genre of literature, and the serious intent the work seems to present.

The legitimacy of fanfiction as literature was assessed with these criteria in mind. A conclusion was reached through exploring laws relevant to fanfiction and professional authors' attitudes on fanfiction as a genre. I also conducted a survey of the fanfiction community to assess the role of fanfiction in the literary world and to identify the serious social intent that fanfiction promotes.

Do you believe that after a work of fiction is published, it belongs only to its author?



■ Yes, the story and characters belong to its author  
■ No, a published text belongs to the readers as well

Figure 2 (Above)

## Laws: An Author's Rights

Today, copyright laws and 'moral rights'<sup>1</sup> exist to protect an author's ownership over their work. However, a fanfiction writer's use of copyrighted intellectual property doesn't break these laws due to fair use policies, which protect transformative works. When considering ownership of the original content, results from my survey found that fanfiction authors don't entirely believe that they 'own' the pre-existing content (see Figure 2), but still can legally

interpret existing works with the protection of these fair use policies. Some professional authors disapproved of fans making use of their content without permission, however others saw fanfiction as a useful way to encourage creativity. The success of Japanese doujinshi,<sup>2</sup> self-published stories that are often based on pre-existing content, shows that fan-created content can even be beneficial to the author, keeping their fan base engaged in the original work.



Figure 3 (Above)

## Genre: The New Folk Tale

Some supporters justify fanfiction as a way of 'repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk.'<sup>3</sup> Fanfiction is seen as the new oral folk tale, a modern adaptation of a genre whose works took from existing stories before they were collected together by such writers as the Brothers Grimm. Unlike folk tales, fanfiction travels not through

word of mouth but through the internet and, similarly to folk tales, rarely makes a profit. As shown from my survey results, fanfiction writers create not for profit, but due to a passionate desire to expand on the original text and explore 'layers and facets' to the story that the original author was 'unable to consider or expand upon.' Fanfiction is recognised by many as a genre that encourages the 'remixing'<sup>4</sup> of pre-existing content and spreading of stories.

'Why do you read fanfiction?'

'I read fanfiction as it is a way of having an almost limitless access to new and interesting plots and stories involving characters that would otherwise be confined to the stories they were made for.' – Respondent in my survey of the fanfiction community.

When reading fanfiction, which of these types of ship do you prefer to read about? Tick all boxes that apply to you.

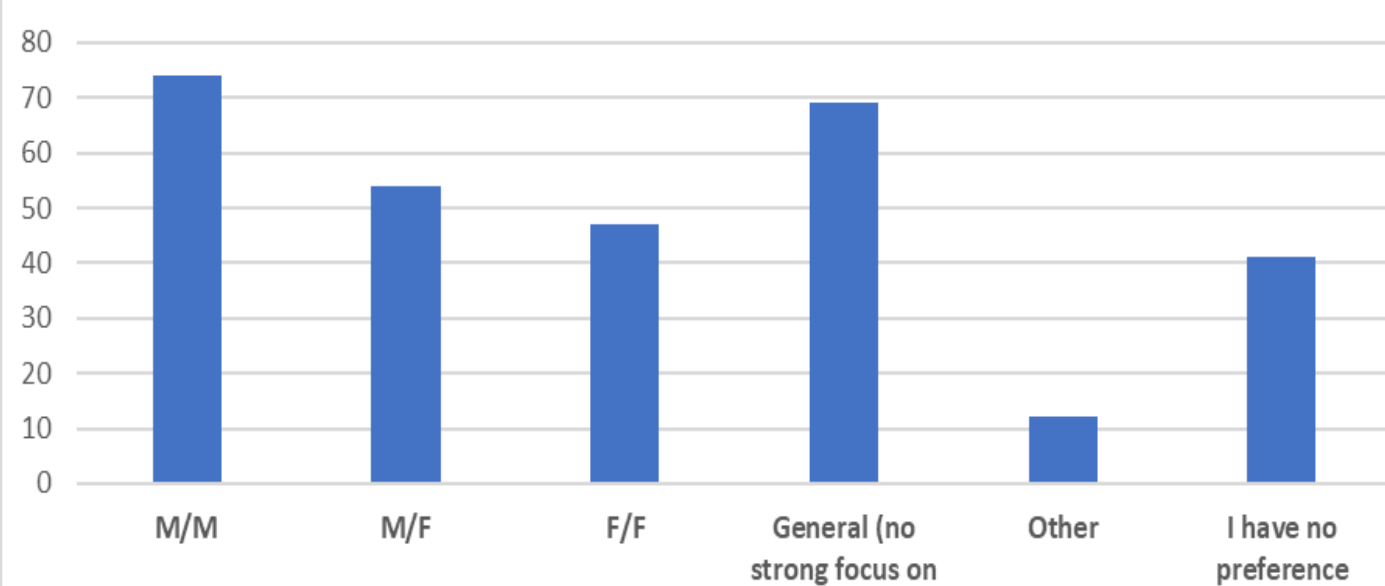


Figure 4 (Above)

## Serious Intent: LGBT Themes

The heavy volume of LGBT content within fanfiction suggests that the serious intent of fanfiction as a literary medium is to positively represent LGBT relationships, and stories about male homosexual relationships are typically the most popular (see Figure 4). However, some argue that the presentation of the romantic and sexual lives of gay men by typically female writers is exploitative, comparing it to sexualisation

of women in film and especially in lesbian pornography. However, my analysis of examples of fanfiction revealed that fanfiction focuses more on depth of character than sexualisation, aiming to normalise the liberation of males from traditional gender performance. This implies that there is serious intent in the fanfiction community to liberate the LGBT community from traditionally heteronormative gender roles.

## Conclusion

This research concluded that, while fanfiction is disregarded by some professionals, others view it as legitimate in its encouragement of creativity and its comparability to oral folk tales of the past. Its content is also praised, particularly for promoting a more tolerant presentation of LGBT relationships.

### Textual References

- <sup>1</sup> David, Matthew and Debora Halbert, 'Creative Copying' in *The SAGE Handbook of Intellectual Property* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015), p.399.
- <sup>2</sup> Rich Duffy and Michael Richey, 'Japan's Doujinshi Culture of Creativity Through Theft', *Tofugu*, 2016 <<https://www.tofugu.com/japan/doujinshi-definition/>> [Accessed 30 January 2019].
- <sup>3</sup> Coppa, Francesca, *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales For The Digital Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), p.6.
- <sup>4</sup> Darren Wershler, 'Conceptual Writing as Fanfiction', in *Fic: Why Is Fanfiction Taking Over the World*, ed. by Anne Jamison and Lev Grossman, (Dallas: BenBella Books, Inc, 2013) <<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171>> [Accessed 14 March 2019], p.371.

### Photo References

- Figure 1 – Author's Own. (2019) Harry Potter Book and Fanfiction Site [Photograph].  
Figure 2 – Author's Own. (2019) Pie chart to demonstrate fan's opinions on where the ownership of fiction belongs.  
Figure 3 – s-ms\_1989 (2017) Brothers Grimm Hanau Statue [Photograph] Available from: <https://pixabay.com/photos/brothers-grimm-hanau-fairy-tale-town-3667289/>.  
Figure 4 – Author's Own (2019) Bar chart to demonstrate fan's preference on fictional 'ships'.

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